

Two new Snakes from Lower Congo.

Described

by

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With 3 Textfigures.

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From time to time Mr K. E. LAMAN and his fellow missionaries at the Swedish missionstation Mukimbungu in Lower Congo have kindly presented small collections of reptiles to the R. Natural History Museum.¹ This autumn as well, such a little collection arrived from Mr LAMAN, and, when labeling the snakes, I was very pleasantly surprised in finding among them two specimens which could not be identified with the aid of the available literature and which I therefore venture to describe as new

***Mehelya*² (or *Simocephalus*) *lamani* n. sp.**

Rostral much broader than deep, well visible from above, the length of the visible portion being contained about four times in its distance from the frontal. Internasals broader

¹ The number of species of snakes received from Lower Congo now amounts to 27, which all of them, however, except the two species now to be described are known from the West African region.

² POCHÉ has stated (Zool. Ann. XXVI p. 699) that *Simocephalus* GÜTHR is preoccupied by *Simocephalus* SCHÖDL. and he hastened to enrich the ophidian synonymy, with not less than two new generic names (*Grobbernia* and *Siebenrockia*) but CSIKIS name *Mehelya* has to be used for this genus, if GÜNTHERS name has to be abandoned.

than long, about one half the length of the præfrontals. Frontal very short, about as broad as long, a little shorter than the præfrontals, shorter than its distance from the rostral, much shorter than the parietals. Supraoccipital large, on one side fully two thirds as broad as the frontal, on the other where it has been fused with the upper postocular quite as broad as the frontal. Loreal about as long as deep. One præ- and one (right), or two (left) postoculars. Temporals 1+2. Seven upper labials, third and fourth entering the eye. Only four lower labials in contact with the anterior chin shields, which are longer than the posterior. Eye rather small but larger than the nostril. Scales strongly keeled in 15 rows, 17 on the neck. The scales of the nape are smaller but the bicarinate median row

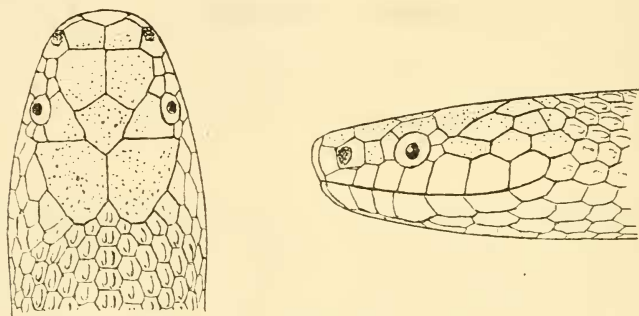


Fig. 1. *Mehelya (Simocephalus) lamani* n. sp. nat. size.

and all the lateral rows can be followed all the way to the head shields. The middle keel of each scale usually with three elevations or tubercles. In addition to this main keel the scales are provided with lateral keels or rows of tubercles, and with deep striations. On the outermost row of scales the keels are only slightly developed. Ventrals 231; subcaudals 53, anal entire.

Dark olive brown above, each scale with a light spot at the tip. Lower side except the lateral end of ventrals light-coloured (yellowish white in spirit).

As the figures indicate this new species is a rather large and heavily built snake. The total length of the present specimen is about 145 cm. and of this the tail is 17,5 cm. The thickness is also considerable, the greater part of the body having a diameter which is nearly or quite 3 cm.

The hypapophyses of the vertebral column are very large and broad.

A considerable number of species of this genus have already been described, and not less than 7 of these have been found at some place or other in West Africa. It appeared therefore quite strange that the present specimen could not be identified with any of the known forms, but this was impossible, and finally to make sure about the differences I compiled the following list of the species hitherto described, together with the characteristics by which each of them differs from the snake from Lower Congo. It may be found from this that the snake now named differs in so many respects from every other member of the genus that it cannot possibly be united with any of them.

Mehelya (Simocephalus) capensis (SMITH).

Rostral just visible from above; internasals two thirds the length of the præfrontals, frontal slightly shorter than the parietals as long as its distance from the rostral or the end of snout.

From South Africa to Nyassaland, Beira and Gaboon.

M. (S.) guirali (MOQUARD).

Frontal as long as the præfrontals; third, fourth and fifth labial entering the eye; five lower labials in contact with the anterior chin shields; ventrals 248—255; subcaudals 60—70.

West Africa (Cameroons to Loango).

M. (S.) poensis (SMITH).

Frontal as long as its distance from the rostral; five lower labials in contact with the anterior chin shields, secondary keels of scales feebly marked or absent; ventrals 240—256; subcaudals 75—124.

West Africa to Ruwenzori.

M. (S.) nyassæ GTHR.

Frontal as long as its distance from the rostral; loreal longer than deep; one postocular; supraocular much narrower

than the frontal; five lower labials in contact with the anterior chin shields. Ventrals 171—178; subcaudals 62—63.

Nyassa, Zansibar, to Natal.

M. (S.) stenophthalmus (MOQUARD).

Eye scarcely larger than the nostril; a single postocular; ventrals 206—214. etc.

Coast of Guinea.

M. (S.) chanleri STEJNEGER.

Internasals two thirds the length of the præfrontals; three postoculars; five lower labials in contact with the anterior chin shields.

Island Manda, N. of Lamu, Brit. E. Africa.

M. (S.) crossi BLGR.

Internasals two thirds the length of the præfrontals; frontal as long as its distance from the end of the snout; temporals 2 + 3; scales in 17 rows.

Niger.

M. (S.) phyllopholis WERNER.

Internasals two thirds the length of the præfrontals; frontal more than twice as broad as the supraocular; no loreal; five lower labials in contact with the anterior chin shields; scales of the nape very small; keels of scales branched; body slender

Cameroons.

M. (S.) butleri BLGR.

Præfrontals nearly as long as the frontal; frontal as long as its distance from the end of the snout; three postoculars; five lower labials in contact with the anterior chin shield.

Bahr-el-Ghazal.

M. (S.) baumanni STERNFELD.

Three postoculars; three labials entering the eye; five lower labials in contact with the anterior chin shields; scales feebly keeled; subcaudals 65.

Togo.

Prosymna meleagris concolor n. subsp.

Rostral very large and broad with a blunt horizontal edge; a single internasal, and a single præfrontal, which is plainly, although narrowly, excluded from the eye by the præocular and the supraocular. Frontal large, more than half the width of the head, a little shorter than the parietal measured along its longest diameter; the antero-lateral angles of the frontal excluded from the eye by the supraocular which is in contact as well with the præfrontal as with the præocular. Parietals broad, their width being more than half their length. Loreal much longer than deep. One præ- and two postoculars. Temporals 1+2. Five upper labials, second and third entering the eye; only one pair of well developed chin shields in contact with three lower labials. Behind the chin shields a transverse series of three subequal enlarged scales. Scales of body smooth in 17 rows. Ventrals 132, subcaudals 32+ (the tip being broken); anal entire. Uniform black above, dark blackish grey below with paler edges to the ventrals.

From the hitherto described species of the genus the new species from Lower Congo is readily distinguished through the following characteristics compiled from the descriptions in the literature:

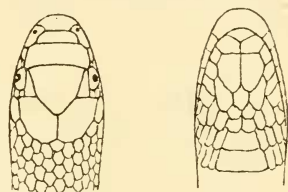


Fig. 2. *Prosymna meleagris concolor* n. subsp. double nat. size.

Prosymna jani BIANCONI

has 17 rows of keeled scales, two præoculars, six upper labials etc.
Mozambique.

P. sundevallii (SMITH)

has two internasals, and two superposed anterior temporals, usually seven (rarely 8) upper labials etc.

South Africa.

P. frontalis (PETERS)

has a narrow frontal which does not attain half the width of the head; fourth and fifth labials entering the eye etc.

Southwestern Africa.

P. ambigua BOCAGE

has six or seven upper labials, third and fourth entering the eye; whitish or brown below.

East Africa, Angola, Zululand.

P. bocagei BLGR.

frontal reaching the eyes; præfrontal entering the eye; one postocular; six upper labials, third and fourth entering the eye; rostral more angularly pointed and slightly turned up at the end.

Mbangi district.

P. meleagris (REINHARDT)

has only one postocular; black above with a whitish terminal dot on each scale uniform yellowish white below.

West Africa.

Finally, MOQUARD has described¹ a species *P. greigerti* from French Sudan but this is still more different than the others having two internasals, two præfrontals etc.

Some of these forms described as species, are of course, more nearly related to each other than others. The *Prosymna* from Lower Congo now described appears to be most nearly allied with *P. meleagris*, and to begin with I was inclined only to regard it as a subspecies of this species, (and this proved also later to be the correct view). But when comparing the present specimen with REINHARDT's original description,² and especially his figures, I found the discrepancy so great that I was nearly compelled to abandon this opinion and regard it as a new species which is also more in conformity with the usual proceedings among herpetologists in similar cases, probably because we do not know as yet how far the variation among the snakes can go.³ Returning to this *Prosymna* from Lower Congo I must draw the attention to the fact that if the present specimen is compared with REINHARDT's figures there are several other differences to be seen in addition to those revealed by the description.

¹ Bull. Mus. d'hist. nat. T. XII. Paris 1906 p. 466.

² K. Dansk. Vidensk. Selsk. Skr. Deel X. Kjöbenhavn 1843, p. 238. Tab. I fig. 4—6.

³ Such interesting investigations as BOULENGER's on the genus *Grayia* (Proc. Zool. Soc. London 1909) are apt to throw a better light on the colour variations of snakes.

The presence of two postoculars instead of only one is not by itself so very important, because in the latter case an upper postocular might have become fused with the supraocular, which appears the most probable interpretation in this instance, or both postoculars might have joined inter se. A comparison of the specimen now considered, and REINHARDT's figure of the type of *P. meleagris* indicates that the shape of the parietals is very different in the two. In the former the parietals are rather large and broad so that their width is considerably more than half their length, but in the latter the width of the parietals is contained fully twice in their length. REINHARDT says also about this »Nakkeskjoldene ere kun lidt udviklede» (l. c. p. 239) which in this connection must be translated: »the parietals are only little developed». Of less importance is perhaps that the posterior upper margin of the rostral is angular on REINHARDT's figure but the Congo specimen has a quite straight transversal suture between the rostral and the internasal. The dimensions of the præfrontal is also different, in *P. meleagris* its length being more than half the length of the frontal, while it is less than half the frontal in LAMAN's *Prosymna*. The supraocular of the former is larger especially wider, its width behind being much more than half its length, and anteriorly it has a rather broad suture to the præfrontal, while the same shield in the new species is narrow with its greatest width about equal to half its length and anteriorly its suture to the præfrontal is short.

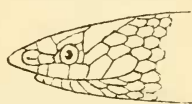


Fig. 3. *P. m. concolor*.

The shape of the upper labials is also different. According to REINHARDT's figures quoted they, as well as the loreal, look larger when compared with other shields in *P. meleagris* than in the species from Lower Congo. The snout appears to be more strongly projecting in the latter.

Since this comparison between the present specimen and REINHARDT's description and figure of *Prosymna meleagris* had been made, and the result written down I had, thanks to the kindness of my friend Dr. AD. JENSEN, the opportunity of making a renewed and this time direct comparison with REINHARDT's type kept in the Zoological Museum in Copenhagen. By this it was fully proved that REINHARDT's figure is inaccurate, and the difference between the present specimen and *P. meleagris* appears to be of subspecific value.

The most important differences are in addition to these already mentioned the following. The rostral extends further backwards on the upper surface than in *P. meleagris*, and the whole rostrum projects more beyond the mandible. The internasals are shorter but broader than in *P. meleagris*. In the latter the supraocular is more broadly in contact with the prefrontal, and in consequence of this the frontal is broader in front in *P. m. concolor*. The parietals are quite wrongly represented in REINHARDT'S figure 4 (l. c.). They are in reality very much broader. The type of *P. meleagris* has 35 subcaudals, and its colour is different from that of the present specimen.

When writing about African snakes I take the opportunity of making a statement concerning a snake which I described and figured some years ago under the name of *Dendraspis sjöstedti* from Kilimandjaro.¹ Reviewing this paper in Archiv für Naturgeschichte² WERNER has expressed his doubts about this snake with the following words: »ob nicht ein *Chlorophis*? aus der Abbildung nicht zu erkennen!» Now, of course, everybody can make a mistake, but to charge without any other foundation than mere guessing an author with such a gross mistake as of describing a *Chlorophis* under the name of *Dendraspis* is a little too much. As if I should not have been able to see the big fangs as well in the upper as in the lower jaw of a *Dendraspis*! Having guessed that the figure represented the head of a *Chlorophis* WERNER thinks that it is not recognizable, but if the true fact that it represents a *Dendraspis*, as it really does is kept in mind, I think the figure is characteristic enough.

¹ Wiss. Ergebn. d. Schwed. Zool. Exp. Kilimanjaro Meru. 4 Reptilia and Batrachia p. 17.

² Jahrg. 74. Bd. II. Hft. 1, III p. 35.

Tryckt den 15 december 1910.